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An affiliate of the  
National Education Association

*Testimony of*

*Mark Waxenberg*

**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the Education Committee*

**Re: SB 1096 AAC Charter Schools**

*March 19, 2015*

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Mark Waxenberg, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state.

We testify in support of SB1096, and ask lawmakers to consider additional transparency improvements that could strengthen this bill.

Specifically, we believe that for any charter school to receive approval, it must first receive a vote of approval from the local board of education in the school district where the school is proposed to operate. We believe that this makes good fiscal sense because the expansion of charter schools in our cities has a significant impact on local public schools. For example, a recent estimate of the local financial impact of charter schools shows a \$2.9 million cost to the Bridgeport Public Schools (see analysis attached). A similar analysis in Stamford shows nearly \$700,000 in costs to the local board of education for the addition of one state charter school. The overall impact of charters and CMOs on local school districts and their students must not be ignored.

Additionally, there have been instances when a significant local opposition to new charter schools has been ignored by the State Board of Education. In fact, one local board of education recently voted 7-1 in opposition of a new charter school opening in the district, yet its position was simply ignored by State Board members. The state should ensure that the approval process for charter schools is respectful of the democratic process and in the interest of local communities.

We support the provision in the bill clarifying that Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) are subject to the Freedom of Information Act. We believe that CMOs are already covered by Freedom of Information laws in the same way as their schools. But some CMOs appear to believe that they are above the law and have ignored Freedom of Information requests. Yet some of these same CMOs also apply for and receive public tax dollars and grants available only to school districts and public schools. They can't have it both ways.

We also support the provision in the bill freezing the expansion of charter schools. With the performance of charter schools still unclear, questionable enrollment practices, and unchecked oversight, it is time to rethink Connecticut's 20-year experiment. Moreover, with state charter school funding exceeding \$100 million and proposed to increase by 169% between 2009 and 2017, it is time to rethink the state's fiscal commitment to charters, particularly in relation to the state's obligation to fully fund the Education Cost Sharing grant. The proposed moratorium makes sense.

We fully support this bill and believe with the inclusion of local approval, it vastly improves CMO and charter school accountability. Nevertheless, we believe that there are additional provisions that could better provide public oversight to this tremendous amount of tax dollars.

We respectfully refer members to our testimony on SB943 AAC Charter School Modernization and Reform, which included suggestions regarding additional transparency provisions. We also repeat our reference to a report by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform on charter school transparency: *Public Accountability for Charter Schools: Standards and Policy Recommendations for Effective Oversight.*

The highlights of our testimony, informed by the Annenberg report, call for charter school and CMO laws to, among other things:

- Protect traditional neighborhood schools from losing funding and other resources, resulting in greater inequities in districts where charter schools operate.
- Require local school boards to hold a vote determining whether to permit a state charter school be allowed to operate in the district.
- Include anti-fraud, conflict of interest, and anti-nepotism protections.
- Ensure charters employ highly-qualified teachers who hold state teacher certification.
- Require strong, transparent independent audits for better oversight of public dollars.
- Extend Freedom of Information laws to require open proceedings and public disclosure of financial practices to CMOs that operate schools in the state.
- Require charters to serve high-needs students at the same levels as traditional neighborhood public schools and address excessive charter school student expulsions.

We urge lawmakers to support this bill and consider other provisions that could make this bill even stronger.

Thank you.

CHARTER SCHOOLS - FISCAL ANALYSIS  
2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR

Schools	Total # Bus Routes	# Bus Routes Added 2014-15	# School Days	Transp NOTES	TRANSP COST	SPED TR FTE at School	Special Ed Teachers (annual cost billed by the Quarter School to BPS)	Additional Services Provided by BPS through BPS-employed staff:				Value of Services Provided by BPS- employed staff				GRAND TOTAL
								Social Worker Service	Psychologist Service	Speech Language Service	FTE	Social Worker	Psychologist	Speech Language		
Bridge Academy	6	0	182 D	Tiered-50%	198,351	2	223,330	0.00	0.20	0.10		0	22,333	11,167		455,180
New Beginnings	6	0	182 D	Tiered-50%	198,351	2	223,330	0.50	0.20	0.30		55,833	22,333	33,500		533,346
Park City Prep	6	1	182 D	Tiered-50%	198,351	2	178,664	0.50	0.20	0.20		55,833	22,333	22,333		477,513
Achievement First	12	3	191 D 182D	Partial Tier - No Tier=100%	435,936	3	334,995	1.00	0.40	0.80		111,665	44,666	89,332		1,016,594
Great Oak	2	2	200 D		145,312	1	111,665	0.00	0.20	0.00		0	22,333	0		279,510
Stanford Academy					0		0	0.50	0.20	0.00		55,833	22,333	0		78,166
Slide by Side					0		0	0.00	0.00	0.50		0	0	55,833		55,833
Total	32	6			1,176,301	10	1,071,984	2.50	1.40	1.90		279,163	156,331	212,164		2,895,942
															647,657	

NOTE:  
Transportation for Achievement First was calculated at 182 days (BOE) plus 9 additional days.  
Transportation for Great Oak was calculated for 200 days.

Cost Factor	2014-15	Res Tr	SW	Psy	Sp Lang
Salary	71,000	80,000	79,000	71,000	
Benefits	21,836	21,836	21,836	21,836	
Total	111,665	111,665	111,665	111,665	

<b>Bronx School for Excellence Charter Application</b>						
<b>Cost Estimate</b>						
<b>District is responsible for "Like Transportation" and Special Education</b>						
<b>Year</b>		<b>2015-16</b>				
<b>Grade</b>	Pre-K	56				
	K	56				
	1	56				
	2					
	3					
	4					
	5					
		<b>168</b>				
<b>Est Sp Ed Students</b>		18				
<b>Administration</b>	\$	10,000				
<b>Sp Ed Teachers</b>		1.0				
<b>\$cost</b>	\$	70,000				
<b>Pupil Services</b>						
<b>Speech&amp; Language</b>		0.4				
<b>Social Work</b>		0.4				
<b>Psychology</b>		0.4				
		1.2				
<b>\$cost</b>	\$	84,000				
<b>Sp Ed Para</b>		1.0				
<b>\$ cost</b>		40,000				
<b>Transportation</b>						
<b>6 buses x \$80,000</b>	\$	480,000				
<b>Total SPS cost</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>684,000</b>				